



Message From State Director Rob Steptoe

West Virginia USDA Rural Development has its work cut out for Fiscal Year 2007. Benchmarks set in Fiscal Year 2006 will require the utmost dedication from our staff and I am pleased to say that this first quarter indicates that we are on track.

President George W. Bush's telecommunications initiative also remains a high priority in West Virginia and we expect that to continue.

Additionally, Rural Development has numerous loan and grant programs available and West Virginia has knowledgeable employees who are eager and com-



mitted to assist communities, businesses, and individuals with their economic development needs.

We strive to meet our mission of increasing economic opportu-

nity and improving the quality of life for all rural Americans through leveraging limited resources and developing lasting partnerships.

Our vision is a rural America that is a healthy, safe and prosperous place to live and work.

I encourage you to utilize the directory on page 4 and contact your local office for assistance.

As we begin this New Year, we at USDA Rural Development wish you and your families a Happy, Safe, Healthy & Prosperous New Year!

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USDA Is Preparing—Avian Influenza

As part of the President's National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza, which includes both avian influenza and human pandemic preparedness, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is working with its partners on the international and domestic fronts to help control the spread of high-pathogenicity H5N1 avian influenza.

Avian Influenza (AI), also known as the bird flu, is a virus that infects wild birds and domestic poultry.

Just like the flu virus that humans get, some forms of bird flu are worse than others.

Although this virus does not usually infect people, more than 200 human cases have been reported since 2004. Most of those have had extensive, direct

Broad concerns about public health stem from the potential for the virus to mutate, or change into a form that could easily spread from person to person, a characteristic that could result in a human influenza pandemic. There is no evidence that this is occurring. The strains of AI that have been detected in U.S. poultry have caused no known human illnesses.

What efforts has USDA taken to protect its citizens?

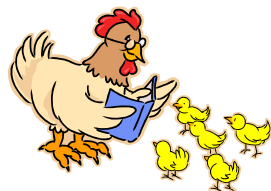
- USDA quarantines and tests live birds imported;
- USDA maintains trade restrictions on the importation of poultry and poultry products;
- USDA regulations require that import permits accompany properly sanitized poultry products, such as raw feathers; and
- USDA has increased its monitoring for illegally smuggled poultry and poultry products through an anti-smuggling program in coordination with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security—Customs and Border Protection.

USDA is ready to work closely with Federal, State, local and tribal partners, as well as industry stakeholders, to coordinate emergency response to animal disease outbreaks.

In the event of an outbreak in the United States, these five basic steps will be carried out decisively and quickly:

- **QUARANTINE**—restrict movement of poultry and poultry-moving equipment into and out of the control area;
- **ERADICATE**—humanely euthanize;
- **MONITOR REGION**—broad area of testing;
- **DISINFECT**—kills virus; and
- **TEST**—confirm that the poultry farm is AI virus-free.

USDA also maintains a bank of AI vaccine that could be used to protect healthy birds outside a control area, if necessary.



Properties For Sale:

Information on Real Estate Owned (REO) properties for sale and upcoming foreclosure sales can be found at www.homesales.gov.

Combined Federal Campaign Update



David A. Hurley, West Virginia USDA Rural Development's 2006-2007 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) for United Way Coordinator (**pictured to the right**) hosted a kick-off event on October 31, 2006 for local co-workers to get the campaign fully underway.

The theme of this year's campaign was "It's About You" with an emphasis on "It's About Hope," "It's About Caring," and "It's About Community."

The campaign was officially ended on December 18, 2006, when the last federal agency turned in their report.

As in the past, the federal donors did not disappoint; this year, the Monongalia and Preston Counties Combined Federal Campaign raised \$160,087!

Rural Development State Office staff had set a goal of \$2,500 and just fell short of that by raising \$2,294.

Mr. Hurley stated, "I would like to thank all those who participated. Also, I want to sincerely thank State Director Rob Steptoe and Housing Programs Director Dianne Cryslar for their support during the campaign. Every dollar raised makes a difference in lives here at home and throughout the world."



The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee-focused, cost-efficient, and effective in providing all federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all.

Gauley River PSD Holds Dedication Ceremony

The Gauley River Public Service District (GRPSD) held a dedication ceremony and check presentation to dedicate the water extension to Twentymile and Route 39/Peters Creek area.

This check presentation was held on Tuesday, October 17, 2006 at the Swiss Missionary Baptist Church, Swiss, WV.

Formed in 1986, the Gauley River PSD currently provides public water service to over 800 citizens and businesses throughout Nicholas, Fayette, and Clay Counties.

USDA Rural Development has assisted the District in providing loan and grant funding for several water projects during the past 15 years. Since 1991, Rural Development has provided a total of \$6,641,710 in grant and \$3,694,000 in loan funding to directly benefit the citizens within the District's service area.

This most recent project proposes to construct approximately 103,000 feet of new waterline, 60 fire hydrants, two booster stations, and two water storage tanks to provide safe and reliable water service to 250 new rural residents within Nicholas County.

The residents of the Twentymile and Route 39/Peters Creek area currently must utilize private water sources consisting primarily of ground wells and cisterns that often provide water of insufficient quantity and quality. The public health benefits

realized as a result of this project include a safe and stable supply of drinking water, as well as, public fire protection for the proposed service area.



For this project, USDA Rural Development provided loan funds in the amount of \$1,623,000 and grant funds in the amount of \$3,533,310 for a total loan/grant package of \$5,156,310.

The Abandoned Mine Lands (AML) program provided a grant of \$753,840 for a total project cost of \$5,910,150.

Pictured above (l to r): Ken Ellison (Director of Land Restoration for WVDEP Abandoned Mine Lands Program); John Tuggle (Project Engineer, Pentree, Inc.); Russell Deering (GRPSD Board Chairman); Ted Elliott (GRPSD Board Secretary); Rob Steptoe (State Director, USDA Rural Development); Birl O'Dell (Nicholas County Commissioner); and Tom Blankenship (Nicholas County Commissioner).



Pictured above (l to r): Russell Deering (GRPSD Board Chairman) accepts the ceremonial check award from USDA Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe.

Applications Being Accepted For Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program

USDA Rural Development State Director Robert M. Steptoe, III, announces the maximum dollar amount on loan and grant awards under the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) program for Fiscal Year 2007.

Further information and those dollar amounts can be found in the December 8 edition of the Federal Register at <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-20871.htm>.

This notice is being issued prior to passage of a final appropriations bill to allow applicants sufficient time to leverage financing, submit applications, and give Rural Development time to process applications within the current fiscal year.

The awards made as a result of this notice are effective for loans and grants made during fiscal year beginning October 1, 2006, and ending September 30, 2007.

Rural Economic Development Loans and Grants are available to any electric or telecommunica-

tions cooperative (borrower) under the Rural Electrification Act that does not have any delinquent debt with the Federal Government that has not been resolved pursuant to 31 CFR 285.13.

REDLG loans and grants are to assist in economically developing rural areas.

Entities wishing to apply for assistance should contact John Commerci, Business and Cooperative Programs Specialist, 481 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV

25801, telephone 304.253.9597 (extension 146), fax 304.252.5809, or TTY/TDD 304.284.4836.

Completed applications should be mailed to the WV Rural Development State Office, 75 High Street, Suite 320, Morgantown, WV 26505-7500.

Additional information on the REDLG program may be found on the USDA web site at: <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/busp/redl.htm>.

Applications Being Accepted For Rural Business Opportunity Grants

Robert M. Steptoe, III, State Director of West Virginia USDA Rural Development, announces the availability of competitive grants of up to \$50,000 per application from the Rural Business Opportunity Grant (RBOG) program for Fiscal Year 2007.

For multi-state projects, grant funds of up to \$150,000 will be available on a competitive basis.

This notice is being issued prior to passage of a final appropriations bill to allow applicants sufficient time to leverage financing, submit applications, and give

Rural Development time to process applications within the current fiscal year.

The deadline for the receipt of applications in the Rural Development State Office is March 30, 2007. Any applications received after that date will not be con-

sidered for Fiscal Year 2007 funding.

For further information, entities wishing to apply for assistance should contact John Commerci, Business and Cooperative Programs Specialist, 481 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV 25801, telephone 304.253.9597 (extension 146), fax 304.252.5809, or TTY/TDD 304.284.4836.

The primary objective of the Rural Business Opportunity Grant program is to improve the economic conditions of rural areas. Assistance provided to rural areas under this program may include technical assistance for business development and economic development planning.

Further information can be found in the December 8 edition of the Federal Register at <http://a257.gakamaitech.net/7/257/242/2/01jan20061800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2006/E6-20875.htm>.

Federal Employees Commemorate National Native American Month

November 16, 2006. Federal employees of the Harley O. Staggers Federal Building, Morgantown, WV, commemorated National Native American Month with display setups that included artifacts, literature and historical information available throughout the day for employees to view at their convenience.



WV USDA Rural Development Offices

Office/Address/Service Area	Phone Number	Fax Number
State Office 75 High Street, Suite 320 Morgantown, WV 26505-7500 Housing Programs Community Programs Business & Cooperative Programs	(800) 295-8228 or (304) 284-4860 (304) 284-4868 (304) 284-4890 (304) 284-4883	(304) 284-4893 (304) 284-4893 (304) 284-4892 (304) 284-4893
Area I P.O. Box 303, Parkersburg, WV 26102	(304) 420-6664	(304) 420-6876
Area II Randolph Center Building, 1200 Harrison Avenue, Suite 150, Elkins, WV 26241	(304) 636-2158	(304) 636-5902
Area III 481 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV 25801	(304) 253-9597	(304) 252-5809
Cross Lanes 418 Goff Mountain Road, Room 103, Cross Lanes, WV 25313 Counties Served: Putnam, Kanawha, Boone, Logan, and Mingo (Area III) Sub-Office: Logan—513 Dingess Street, Logan WV 25601	(304) 776-5298 (304) 752-8427	(304) 776-5326 (304) 752-7657
Huntington 2631 Fifth Street Road, Huntington, WV 25701 Counties Served: Wayne, Cabell, and Lincoln (Area I)	(304) 697-6033	(304) 697-4164
Lewisburg 179 Northridge Drive, Lewisburg, WV 24901 Counties Served: Greenbrier, Pocahontas, and Monroe (Area III)	(304) 645-7422	(304) 647-9627
McMechen 1 Ball Park Drive, McMechen, WV 26040 Counties Served: Brooke, Hancock, Marshall, Ohio, Wetzel, and Tyler (Area I) Sub-Office: Middlebourne—10 Pleasantview Lane, Sistersville, WV 26175	(304) 242-0576 (304) 758-2351	(304) 242-7039 (304) 758-4303
Martinsburg 151 Aikens Center, Suite 4, Martinsburg, WV 25401-6211 Counties Served: Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan (Area II)	(304) 263-7547	(304) 267-9172
Mt. Clare Route 2, Box 204-C, Mt. Clare, WV 26408 Counties Served: Harrison, Doddridge, Monongalia, Preston, Marion, and Taylor (Area II) Sub-Office: White Hall—7009 Mountain Park Drive, White Hall, WV 26554	(304) 624-6453 (304) 366-2921	(304) 624-5976 (304) 363-7027
Parkersburg 91 Boyles Lane, Parkersburg, WV 26104 Counties Served: Wood, Wirt, Ritchie, and Pleasants (Area I)	(304) 422-9070	(304) 422-9074
Princeton 241 Mercer Springs Road, Suite A, Princeton, WV 24740 Counties Served: Mercer, Wyoming, McDowell, Raleigh, and Summers (Area III) Sub-Office: Beckley—471 Ragland Road, Beckley, WV 25801 Sub-Office: Pineville—P.O. Building, 2nd Floor, Pineville, WV 24740	(304) 487-1402 (304) 252-4343 (304) 732-8855	(304) 425-0695 (304) 252-5809 (304) 732-9140
Ripley 530 Freedom Road, Ripley, WV 25271 Counties Served: Calhoun, Jackson, Mason, and Roane (Area I)	(304) 372-6231	(304) 372-6856
Romney 500 East Main Street, Suite E, Romney, WV 26757 Counties Served: Hampshire, Mineral, Hardy, Grant, and Pendleton (Area II)	(304) 822-3020	(304) 822-3728
Summersville Federal Building, P.O. Box 248, Summersville, WV 26651 Counties Served: Braxton, Fayette, Nicholas, Webster, and Clay (Area III)	(304) 872-4966	(304) 872-4715
Weston 24 Gateway Drive, P.O. Box 626, Weston, WV 26452 Counties Served: Lewis, Upshur, Gilmer, Randolph, Tucker, and Barbour (Area II) Sub-Office: Elkins—200 Sycamore Street, Room 109, Elkins, WV 26241	(304) 269-8431 (304) 636-6785	(304) 269-7583 (304) 636-1568

Rural Housing Programs Offer Affordable Home Repair Funding

USDA Rural Development's Section 504 loan program is available to homeowners located in rural areas.

The funds can be used for repairs to improve, modernize, or to remove health & safety hazards, such as: roofing, siding, windows, insulation, furnace, air conditioning, water heaters, plumbing, removal of electrical and fire hazards, structural repairs, or handicap accessibility.

The maximum loan amount is \$20,000. Qualified homeowners

can get loans at one percent interest up to 20 years for essential home repairs.

The Section 504 grant program is available exclusively to very low-income rural homeowners 62 years or older. The funds may only be used for repairs or improvements to remove health & safety hazards, or to make the dwelling accessible for household members with a disability.

The maximum lifetime grant amount under the Section 504 program is \$7,500.

A loan/grant combination can be made if the applicant can repay part of the cost. A combination can be made for up to \$27,500 in assistance.

The property (1) need not be brought to Agency development or thermal performance standards; (2) need not have all hazards removed; BUT (3) must have all major health & safety hazards removed.

You can contact your local USDA Rural Development office for assistance.



Southeastern Appalachian Rural Alliance, Inc. Receives Housing Preservation Grant

Susan Rosshirt, Executive Director of Southeastern Appalachian Rural Alliance, Inc. (SARA), contacted Rural Development Manager John Fullen in the Lewisburg, WV office, earlier this year concerning the poor quality of low-income housing in the Ronceverte area.

John discussed the Housing Preservation Grant (HPG) program and the Section 504 housing programs with Ms. Rosshirt.

Ms. Rosshirt gathered the necessary information and applied for a Housing Preservation Grant and SARA was awarded a grant in the amount of \$96,067.05.

A check presentation and dedication ceremony was held on October 31, 2006 at a recently renovated home on Monroe Avenue, Ronceverte, WV. U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall and Rural Development State Director Rob Steptoe were among those that attended the check presentation.

Others in attendance at the dedication ceremony included local and area Rural Development staff, SARA staff, and several residents of Ronceverte.

Mr. Fullen has worked with Ms. Rosshirt and the SARA staff in developing a plan to leverage

Section 504 funds with the HPG program funds. Ed Pluchar with SARA is currently being trained to take applications for the repair work and to assess property deficiencies. Currently, SARA has applications from four families on hand and have had numerous inquiries concerning the programs.

According to SARA staff, they hope to be able to help at least 30 families improve their home and quality of life in the Ronceverte area and eventually throughout Greenbrier County.

"I hope that with the initial success of this Housing Preservation Grant, that we will be able to obtain future grants and continue to help the residents of Greenbrier County," stated Ms. Rosshirt.

Mr. Fullen added, "I see this as a unique opportunity to leverage two Rural Development programs and ultimately help more families."

The Housing Preservation Grant program provides grants to

sponsoring organizations for the repair or rehabilitation of low- and very low-income housing. The grants are competitive and are made available in all areas where there is a concentration of need.

Those assisted must own very low- or low-income housing, either as homeowners, landlords, or members of a cooperative. Very low income is defined as below 50 percent of the area median income; low income is between 50 and 80 percent of the area median income.

Eligible sponsors include state agencies, units of local government, Native American tribes, and nonprofit organizations.

Pictured to the left (l to r):

Ed Pluchar (SARA); John Fullen (Rural Development Manager); Susan Rosshirt (SARA Executive Director); U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall; Rob Steptoe (Rural Development State Director); and Stephen Wetherbee (Rural Development Area Director).





"Wild, Wonderful & Open For Business"

Federal Building, Suite 320
75 High Street
Morgantown, WV 26505-7500

Phone: 304-284-4860 OR 800-295-8228
Fax: 304-284-4893; TTY/TDD 304-284-4836
Gail.Bennett@wv.usda.gov

Almost Heaven WV
Mountain State Rural Express



We're on the Web!

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/wv>



If you are receiving this newsletter via mail and would rather receive it via e-mail, please forward Gail Bennett, Editor, your request to Gail.Bennett@wv.usda.gov.

Federal Employees Commemorate National Disabilities Awareness Month

President George Bush proclaimed October to be National Disabilities Awareness Month.

Employees of the Harley O. Staggers Federal Building in Morgantown, WV, commemorated the event on October 30 with a guest speaker.

Ms. Stacy Miller, Information Specialist for the West Virginia AgrAbility project, provides information and referral, as well as, technical assistance to consumers and clients.

West Virginia AgrAbility is part of a national USDA program that provides resources and recommendations for farmers with disabilities and physical limitations.

Stacy provided the audience with knowledge of how to deal with clients, family, friends, or even

themselves, that might have a limitation of any kind and where help can be obtained. She also enlightened them on products and services that are readily available to assist those with a special need.

"Our country has made great progress to ensure that opportunities are accessible to everyone who is willing and able to work," stated President Bush in Proclamation 8060 of October 3, 2006.

West Virginia AgrAbility has many items available free-of-charge through their loan library that clients can borrow for up to four weeks on a "try before you buy" basis.

If you would like more information, go to West Virginia AgrAbility's web site at: www.cedwvu.org/programs/agrability or call 1-800-841-8436.



Pictured Above: Leonard Jackson, Natural Resources Conservation Service employee, presents Ms. Stacy Miller with a Certificate of Appreciation for helping the employees of the Harley O. Staggers Federal Building in Morgantown, WV, commemorate National Disabilities Awareness Month.